

Thank you, thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:48 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Remarks on Signing the Human Rights Proclamation December 10, 1996

The President. This may be one of those cases where the introduction was better than the speech. [Laughter] Thank you, Julie, and thank all of you for being here. I'm honored to be with this distinguished group on Human Rights Day. I want to thank all of you in attendance. I think Congresswoman Connie Morella is here. Where are you, Connie? There you are, right in front of me. [Laughter] Our AID Administrator, Brian Atwood; Assistant Secretary John Shattuck; Assistant Secretary Phyllis Oakley; and all of you who represent organizations who have done so much to advance the cause of freedom around the world. I want to say a special word of welcome to my good friend Gerry Ferraro. Thank you for being here.

Before I begin what I want to say about human rights, I think it is appropriate on Human Rights Day that I have just gotten a report from the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, who is meeting with our NATO foreign ministers in Brussels, that, together, they agreed to hold an historic NATO summit in July in Madrid to carry forward our goal of building a Europe that is undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in history; one in which we will work to forge a partnership with Russia, adapt NATO to the demands of a new era, and invite the first aspiring members from among Europe's new democracies into NATO. My goal is to see them become full members of the alliance for NATO's 50th birthday in 1999.

It's fitting that this step comes on Human Rights Day and on Bill of Rights Day and in Human Rights Week. The prospect of NATO membership and integration into the West has been a very strong incentive for Europe's new democracies to expand their political freedoms and to promote universal human rights.

Working together with our allies and our partners, we're building a world where, as Judge Learned Hand once said, rights know no boundaries and justice no frontiers.

For the first time in history, more than half the world's people now live under governments of their own choosing. Today we dedicate ourselves to the unfinished task of extending freedom's reach. Promoting democracy and human rights reflects our ideals and reinforces our interests. It's a fundamental pillar of our foreign policy.

History shows that nations where rights are respected and governments are freely chosen are more likely to be partners in peace and prosperity. That is why we've worked hard over the last 4 years to help equality and freedom take root in South Africa, to stop the reign of terror in Haiti, to promote reform in Bosnia and Russia, to bring freedom back to Bosnia, and peace, and to enable millions of suffering people all around the world to reclaim their simple human dignity. That is why we must continue to support the world's newest democracies and to keep the pressure on its remaining repressive regimes.

The First Lady and I have just had a remarkable meeting with these six women. They are courageous in promoting human rights in different ways. They are courageous in promoting democracy and empowerment by helping women to live up to their potential. You can just look at them and see that they've put the lie to the notion that human rights is some Western cultural idea that has no place in other societies.

Julie Su, who spoke so eloquently, has played a crucial role in stopping the exploitation of Thai women immigrants in sweat shops. And I am proud of the work that Secretary Reich and the Labor Department has done in that regard, and we intend to continue to do that for the next 4 years. For the last 20 years, Dawn Calabia has fought to protect women refugees and children. Nahid Toubia is a doctor from Sudan whose organization has played a pioneering role in women's health issues. Barbara Frey has promoted corporate responsibility for human

rights around the world and has also promoted education of children in her native Minnesota in human rights. Wanjiru Muigai from Kenya has helped women in her country to secure their legal rights, and she made a passionate appeal to me to focus on targeting United States aid in a way that will promote the empowerment of women in nation after nation. And since coming here from El Salvador, Lillian Perdomo has worked to protect women from domestic violence right here in the District of Columbia.

Each of these women tells a story for many others. Together their experiences underscore a shared truth. As the First Lady said in Beijing and as Julie repeated, "Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights."

I want to tell you that I am very proud of the role that Hillary, Ambassador Albright, and all the members of the United States delegation—and thank you, Marge Mezvinsky, back here—played in issuing Beijing's call to action. That was a great moment for the United States and a great moment for women around the world.

Beijing's message was as clear as it was compelling. We cannot advance our ideals and interests unless we focus more attention on the fundamental human rights and basic needs of women and girls. We must recognize that it is a violation of human rights when girls and women are sold into prostitution, when rape becomes a weapon of war, when women are denied the right to plan their own families, including through forced abortions, when young girls are brutalized by genital mutilation, when women around the world are unsafe even in their own homes. If women are free from violence, if they're healthy and educated, if they can live and work as full and equal partners in any society, then families will flourish. And when they do, communities and nations will thrive.

We are putting our efforts to protect and advance women's rights where they belong, in the mainstream of American foreign policy. During the last 4 years, we have worked to steer more of our assistance to women and girls, to help protect their legal rights, and to give them a greater voice in their political and economic futures. These programs are making a real difference, whether by raising female voter turnout in Bangladesh, promoting equality for women in Nepal, enabling women in Bosnia to partici-

pate fully in the rebuilding of their country. But we must do more.

Today I call upon the Senate again to ratify the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. As you know, many, many, many other nations have done this. In our country where we have worked so hard against domestic violence, where we have worked so hard to empower women, it is, to say the least, an embarrassment that the United States has not done this, and there is no excuse for this situation to continue.

I'm also pleased to announce several initiatives totaling \$4 million to protect and advance women's rights, including new efforts to help Rwandan women who have been torn from their homes and to provide women refugees around the world with access to reproductive health services. They've built on the commitment I made at last year's G-7 summit to help women in Bosnia start new businesses and will help women across Africa to do the same. They strengthen our commitment to stop the trafficking of women and children for prostitution and child labor. And they will help women's groups in Asia fight violence and discrimination.

In short, these efforts will reinforce America's global leadership on behalf of human rights and democracy in perhaps the most fundamental areas at which they are at risk. They reflect our Nation's enduring commitment to the freedoms of our Bill of Rights that safeguard our own citizens. They support the values in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that promote freedom, justice, and peace all around the world.

We live at a time when our most deeply held ideals are ascendant, but this hopeful trend toward freedom and democracy is neither inevitable nor irreversible, nor has it extended to the real lives of hundreds of millions of people all across the globe. While we seek to engage all nations on terms of good will, we must continue to stand up for the proposition that all people, without regard to their gender, their nationality, their race, their ethnic group, or their religion, should have a chance to live up to their potential.

I want to say again how gratified I am that there are people like these six women alive and well and at work in the world, people like so many of you. It is a constant source of inspiration to me. I want to say again how grateful

I am to the First Lady for going across the world to raise our concerns about this and bringing back to me the knowledge of the work that has been done and what still can be done on behalf of women and girls.

As I sign this proclamation marking International Human Rights Day, I ask you all to remember not just that women's rights are human rights but that the defense and the promotion of human rights are the responsibilities of all of us.

Thank you.

[At this point, the President signed the proclamation on Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week.]

The President. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Geraldine Ferraro, former Vice Presidential candidate, and Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky, Alternate U.S. Representative to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. The proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks on the Appointment of Evelyn Lieberman as Director of the Voice of America and an Exchange With Reporters

December 10, 1996

The President. Fifty-four years ago, just a few months after the United States entered World War II, the Voice of America went on the air with these words: "The news may be good. The news may be bad. We shall tell you the truth." VOA lit Europe's darkest night with a bright spotlight of truth and then became a key weapon in the war of ideas we waged and won against communism.

Today, VOA beams America's voices to nearly 100 million listeners in every corner of our planet every week. The news it delivers—reliable, authoritative, objective—is more important than ever. There are millions and millions of millions of people around the world who are hungry, indeed starved, for accurate information still and for the insights it gives them on how they can organize themselves to change their own lives for the better.

Under Geoff Cowan's extraordinary leadership, the VOA has developed innovative new shows that examine how institutions of democracy and free markets work. It has moved from what Director Cowan calls monolog to dialog, with call-in programs in a dozen languages. We were just talking before we came in about a call-in program that the First Lady did where she got calls from all over the world, including some surprising places. The VOA has increased coverage of human rights issues. It has used the best available technology, like satellites, to deliver better programming to more people.

I thank Geoff, who has been my friend for many years now, for so ably carrying on a family tradition. His father, Louis Cowan, was the VOA's second director. And most of all, I thank him for his service to our Nation and to the community of nations.

All around the world, new democracies we have worked so hard to support are taking root. But they remain fragile, and we must nurture and defend them. The free flow of information is the lifeblood of democracy. And it is very important that the mission of the VOA continue.

I can think of no greater life force for the free flow of ideas and for VOA's future than its new director, whom I have the honor of naming today, Evelyn Lieberman. Her strong, unique voice has reverberated throughout the White House from my first day in office—[laughter]—I see from your laughter that you know I have not overstated that; "reverberated" is the operative word—first as Assistant to the First Lady's Chief of Staff, then as Deputy Press Secretary, most recently as Deputy Chief of Staff, the first woman ever to hold that job.

Evelyn has a special talent for cutting to the chase and getting to the truth, as just about every member of the press corps and the White House staff, including the President, know from first-hand experience. As Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, she did make the trains run on time. But more than that, she made them run straight and true because of her steely deter-